

## Myth #36: Las Vegas' First Post Office Wasn't Named Las Vegas by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

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The Nevada Trivia Book (1998) asks the question, "When did Las Vegas get its first post office?" The answer: "In 1892 the U.S. Postal Service opened an office in the then-tiny hamlet of Las Vegas." Actually, the Nevada post office known as Los Vegas--perhaps to distinguish it from Las Vegas, New Mexico Territory--was established on June 24, 1893. The remote post office in the Mojave Desert went by that name until December 9, 1903, according to *Nevada Post Offices: An Illustrated History* (1983), when its name was changed to Las Vegas. Less than two years later, the town of Las Vegas was founded by the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad Company.



But, there is more to the story. Las Vegas' first post office by another name dates back to August 1, 1855, only eleven years after American explorer John C. Fremont camped in the valley. The post office was named Bringhurst. On June 14, William Bringhurst, at the direction of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day-Saints' President Brigham Young, had established a Mormon colony at Las Vegas--"the meadows" in Spanish--near the Old Spanish Trail. The LDS settlement in western New Mexico Territory, it was hoped, would prosper and serve as a supply point for travelers on the Mormon Trail between Salt Lake City, Utah Territory and Los Angeles, California. While the post office name honored Bringhurst, the name also may have been chosen to distinguish it from the other Las Vegas in eastern New Mexico Territory.

The colony lasted less than two years. The harsh climate, alkaline soil, crop raids by southern Paiutes, internal dissension over lead mining at nearby Mount Potosi, and other matters, doomed the colonization effort. Mormons assigned to the Las Vegas mission were released from their obligation in the spring of 1857. Within two years all had left. The Bringhurst post office, however, was not officially discontinued until September 22, 1860. Others settled in the Las Vegas Valley following the exodus of the Mormons, and the area changed hands from New Mexico Territory to Arizona Territory in 1863 and then to Nevada in 1867, but the numbers and activity did not justify reestablishing a post office until 1893.

Now we know Las Vegas' first post office dates back to 1855, was named Bringhurst not Las Vegas, and, to borrow a well-known phrase from radio personality Paul Harvey, "that's the rest of the story."

Note: For additional information see Ralph Roske and Michael Green's article, "Gass' Station," in the September/October 1989 issue of *Nevada Magazine*.

Photo: University of Nevada Las Vegas Library

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